



Senator Feinstein Calls for an Update on the Department of Homeland Security's Efforts to Improve Federal Disaster Planning

- Federal response to catastrophic disasters that could hit California of particular concern -

April 26, 2006

Washington, DC – U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) today asked the Department of Homeland Security to provide an update on the Department's efforts to deal with problems in federal disaster planning. Every major government report analyzing the government response to Hurricane Katrina has concluded that the National Response Plan, particularly the section covering catastrophic events, is not sufficient.

"I represent a state that is at particular risk from catastrophic disasters, both natural and man-made," Senator Feinstein wrote in a letter to Department of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff. **"While state and local authorities share primary responsibility for preparing for and responding to these disasters, I feel strongly that in large-scale events the federal government must be prepared to supplement, and in particularly severe incidents to supplant, state and local efforts."**

In January 2005, the Department of Homeland Security released the National Response Plan, which is the all-hazards plan dictating federal response to both man-made and natural disasters. Despite major government reports finding federal planning deficient and particularly not up to the task of dealing with catastrophic events such as the Gulf Coast hurricanes, it is unclear that the Department is taking steps to improve the plan.

The following is the text of the letter Senator Feinstein sent to Secretary Chertoff:

April 26, 2006

The Honorable Michael Chertoff
Director
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

I am writing to ask for an update on the Department of Homeland Security's efforts to deal with problems in federal disaster planning as highlighted in recent reports on the federal response to Hurricane Katrina. Of particular concern is the Catastrophic Index of the National Response Plan (NRP).

As you know, I represent a state that is at particular risk from catastrophic disasters, both natural and man-made. While state and local authorities share primary responsibility for preparing for and responding to these disasters, I feel strongly that in large-scale events the federal government must be prepared to supplement, and in particularly severe incidents to supplant, state and local efforts. That said, I am very concerned about the status of federal plans for a catastrophic disaster.

The White House, the House Select Committee investigating Hurricane Katrina, and the Government Accountability Office have all issued reports analyzing the federal government's response to the disasters in the Gulf Coast. Each of these reports found federal planning deficient and particularly not up to the task of dealing with a catastrophic event such as the hurricanes in the Gulf Coast.

To cite specific examples, the three reports reached the following conclusions regarding federal disaster planning:

- The NRP does not adequately plan for federal assets to supplement or supplant first responders.
- The NRP lacks flexibility and adaptability.
- The NRP and its Catastrophic Index does not contain sufficient detail to adequately direct implementation of the federal response.
- The NRP does not adequately define and plan for the use of the U.S. military in a disaster.
- Processes related to the NRP are too bureaucratic leading to serious delays in implementation.

Can you please tell me the steps the Department of Homeland Security is currently taking and plans to take in order to improve federal disaster planning? If there are criticisms or recommendations included in the three reports mentioned above that the Department disagrees with in relation to federal disaster planning, please explain to me the rationale for concluding so.

Thank you for consideration in this matter, and I look forward to your response. My staff member who deals with this issue is John Replogle, who can be reached at (202) 224-3841.

Sincerely,

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

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